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## **A Healing Place: Indigenous Visions for Personal Empowerment and Community Recovery**

**by Kayleen Hazlehurst, Central Queensland University Press, 1994,**

**Reviewed by Bronwyn Fredericks**

On first flicking through the book *A Healing Place* what struck me most was the quality of the print, the format, the easy-to-read layout, and the fabulous artwork. Quite impressive! The book itself is presented in a way which encourages the reader to pick it up and read it.

I looked forward to reading the book, with anticipation and additionally with question. Anticipation that yes, it would offer me something substantial, making me think about empowerment and community recovery; and question, as so often I have picked up well-presented books only to find that they are light on content.

The book is divided into four sections; Parts 1, 2 and 3, and another section titled 'Workbooks'. Each section is quite distinct, and in reviewing the book I decided to work through them individually, and then reflect on the book as a whole.

I found Part I quite powerful, in the sense that Kayleen Hazlehurst conveys some of the hard-hitting statistics and information that is often left out of texts, reports, journals and discourse. Hazlehurst discusses the issues of racism, genocide, the culture of opposition developed within Aboriginal society, and challenges for the future.

In laying her foundation in Part 1, she quotes the work of Judy Atkinson, Audrey Bolger, and Marcia Langton, important writers in stating what the situation is in Aboriginal communities in relation to violence, alcohol and substance abuse, the relationship between alcohol, substance abuse and violence, and what needs to happen in communities. Other writers in this area are additionally drawn on, including Maggie Brady, Sue Wright, Justice Marcus Einfeld, and the handbook titled 'Through Black Eyes'.

In reading, I found Judy Atkinson's and Audrey Bolger's work quoted time and time again, to the point where on some pages over half the text comprised direct quotes from these two women. I feel it may have been a good idea to ask whether these two women would have considered contributing directly to Part 1.

Overall, I found the first three chapters which form Part 1 to be straight to the point. Hazlehurst presents the story as told by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of the current situation.

She discusses the place of pain individuals are facing, the cycle of self-destructiveness that many people are locked into, and the place of dysfunction many of our communities are facing.

Part 2 begins to delve deep into some of the issues of alcoholism as it relates to the Indigenous experience, as well as community action, crisis intervention, and mediation including whole community mediation. Further to this, she explores training programs, change processes, recovery activities, Indigenising processes, and empowerment. Hazlehurst gives examples of how individuals and communities are becoming empowered and taking control. I found the stories about Doomadgee in Queensland and the Poundmaker's Lodge in Canada inspiring, and began to think of other places where these ideas could be transported.

What I particularly liked about Part 2 is that it gives solid examples of where Indigenous individuals and communities from different parts of the world are talking about the issues and getting up programs in their communities. What Hazlehurst has additionally shown in her writings is how Indigenous people all over the world are really looking at their own issues and addressing them in their way. As an Indigenous Australian I felt good reading what is happening, and interested in reading on to Part 3, which explores the establishment of community healing programs and options for the future.

Part 3 discusses the importance of team work, of community participation, of setting up healing circles and support groups. Hazlehurst additionally puts forward the importance of finding the healer within ourselves first. She states this is important 'before we can help anyone else' (page 129). This idea of working on ourselves first comes through in many of the programs that are presented, including the program We Al-Li, which is in the community in which I live.

This part gives hope; it allows the reader to see positive images of what is happening and what communities are doing. It speaks out about working on ourselves and working holistically within our communities. Hazlehurst uses words like 'overcoming denial, blaming and powerlessness in order to become whole, healthy individuals and communities'.

There is another section of the book which is titled 'Workbooks', which could have just been titled for consistency Part 4. 'Workbooks' is filled with a range of activities that can be used by individuals, small groups, large groups and whole communities in looking at personal discovery, healing games, getting people to work together, and building a future.

The book has good readability for both individuals in the community, organisations, government bureaucrats, and health professionals. Marlene Roadruck, a woman I work with, said 'It is the type of book one can take off the shelf when needing a bit of comforting', and that there is a 'significant amount of positive quotations' that have the 'impact of motivating'.

I do have negative comments on the book on which I will not focus, as the worth of the book clearly outweighs the negative. The things that annoyed me was the interchanging of some words, for example 'recovery' and 'regeneration', and the fact the book does not have an index. If you don't use indexes I guess it won't be a problem; if you do then it will be, as it means continually flicking through the book or creating your own ideas.

Overall, the book is very worthy. It has in it many of the beliefs I hold dear, many of the beliefs I have about empowerment and re-empowerment. I believe self-determination, self-management and re-empowerment are not a fantasy; they can be a reality. There are a number of pathways for us as individuals and communities to move along in order to achieve our goals as Indigenous people in this country recently named Australia. Thank you, Kayleen Hazlehurst, for adding a few more in your valuable contribution *A Healing Place*.